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SPEAKING NOTES FOR

THE HONOURABLE ANNE McLELLAN, PC, MP
MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF CANADA

AT THE CONFERENCE OF
THE CANADIAN POLICE ASSOCIATION

OTTAWA, ONTARIO
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Introduction

Let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I see your members at work here in Ottawa and when I am home in Edmonton. I know that front-line policing can be hard and demanding work. I would like to thank you for the work you do every day.

To be honest, I don't think we do enough as Canadians to thank the police for the contribution they make to the well-being of our society. I also think it is important for me, as Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada, to express that appreciation whenever possible. It is a privilege for me to do so today.

I also want to tell you that I value the contribution you as representatives of the Canadian Police Association are making to the continuing dialogue about improving the Canadian criminal justice system.

Of course, I realize we don't always agree. Your organization and I often have to carry out different roles. We both have particular responsibilities that we bring to bear on issues affecting people's lives. Consequently, we sometimes have different perspectives.

But ultimately, I believe we share the same objective of increasing the safety of Canadians and dialogue makes for progress in meeting that goal.

I believe that together we have made progress in a number of important areas, and I want to express my appreciation for the contribution that the Canadian Police Association has made in this regard.

Today, I would like to touch on a few issues where you have made a difference.

Crime Prevention

The police have been of great assistance to us in developing initiatives to support communities in the prevention of crime.

When I launched the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention in June of 1998 with the Solicitor General, I knew that it would succeed because it builds on the energy and ideas of individual partners to realize a common goal of a stronger and safer Canada. Since its inception, the National Strategy has provided support to over 600 community-based projects across Canada. All of these projects, and the communities from which they emerged, are grappling with the problems of crime and victimization.

Already, positive results have been achieved in areas that are of direct concern to the police. For example, the Government of Canada and the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service have joined forces to prevent youth crime in the region by establishing the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Youth Centre's Project Early Intervention. At-risk youth, aged 6 to 12, will benefit from activities which aim to build self-esteem, produce resiliency and prevent future involvement in the justice system.

Another example of the benefits of this partnership is the National Auto Theft Initiative, funded through the Business Action Program on Crime Prevention. As police officers, you know the inconvenience and often danger that auto theft causes in our communities every day.

Auto theft has been a major drain on police resources, and in recent years it has been on the rise. In 1998 alone, almost 166,000 vehicles were stolen, a 66 percent increase over the previous year.

The Insurance Council of Canada saw a need to inform Canadians about the scope of the problem so that the public might make a difference in successfully preventing auto theft. The government contributed $200,000, over a two-year period, to the Council for its National Auto Theft Initiative. This money has funded events like the Vehicle Identification Number public information session, which advised Canadians about the scams that can occur when people buy cars and what they can do to protect themselves.

Activities such as this have raised public awareness about auto theft and have encouraged community-based efforts to prevent those most at risk – particularly youth – from falling into auto theft activity.

Disarming a peace officer

Another example of our working together is Bill C-17, which I introduced last December. The legislation includes the new offence of disarming a peace officer.

This effort to amend the Criminal Code began with a meeting I held with your President, Grant Obst, and other CPA representatives in Edmonton last summer. Your organization followed up with a resolution passed at your annual meeting last August. The changes I have proposed are the direct result of the CPA's work and I look forward to your support as this Bill moves through Parliament.

The amendment moves beyond offences categorized generally as "obstructing a peace officer", to specifically recognize the offence of attempting to take a weapon, and the danger this creates for officers when investigating crimes and making arrests. The CPA has pointed out that several police officers have been killed when suspects have stolen their police weapons.

This change to the Criminal Code is a good example of how we can respond to the concerns of front-line officers by working together.

I hope that Bill C-17 will soon be considered by the House of Commons, and I know the CPA will

make its views known when the bill is studied by the Standing Committee.

C-202

I would also like to highlight the work the CPA has done on Bill C-202, the private member's bill introduced by my colleague Dan McTeague. It would make failure to stop for a peace officer an indictable offence. The work that your organization has done with MPs was a key reason it won such quick passage through the House of Commons.

Victims

The last issue I would like to touch on today has to do with the very difficult situations you deal with every day in your contact with victims of crime.

As you know, the Government of Canada, and I as Minister of Justice, have made helping victims of crime a priority.

Throughout my time in office, I have met with individual victims and representatives of their organizations and have been repeatedly struck by the stories they tell about how the criminal justice system is falling short of the compassionate, respectful response that they deserve.

Last December, Bill C-79, legislation to enhance the safety, security and privacy of victims in the criminal justice system, came into force.

This legislation ensures that victims are informed of opportunities to prepare and deliver victim impact statements. It requires judges to consider the safety of victims in all bail decisions. It makes it easier for victims and witnesses to participate in trials, and it requires all offenders to pay an automatic victim surcharge. This surcharge is collected by the provinces and provides funding for provinces and territories to expand and improve victim services and programs.

As part of my Department's continuing interest in informing the public, we have established a link on our website dedicated to victims' issues; it includes backgrounders and fact sheets on publication bans, victim impact statements, victim surcharges and restitution. Publications on the recent Criminal Code amendments and a guide about the justice system for victims of crime will be available by spring of this year.

The passage of Bill C-79 showed Canadians the shared commitment of Members of Parliament and the dedication and courage of people who worked to make the safety, security and privacy of victims a priority for government.

But we need to do more.

That is why I am so pleased to be able to announce today that 20 million dollars over the next 4 years has been allocated to the Department of Justice for federal victim-related initiatives and programs. I feel very strongly about the need to centralize the federal government's efforts and to give victims a stronger voice, because they are unintentional participants in the criminal justice system.

The new funding will allow the Department's Policy Centre for Victims' Issues to, among other things:

- co-ordinate federal victim initiatives (and play a key role in making sure that restorative justice approaches are victim-centred);
- encourage joint federal-provincial-territorial projects, including research, and the development and dissemination of information about the role of victims in the justice

system;

- support programs and services, public education initiatives, conferences and research by experts and victim advocates;
- work with the provinces and territories in implementing the changes to the Criminal Code in Bill C-79;
- support and encourage initiatives to help children, sexual assault victims and victims of family violence; and
- conduct research and evaluate current initiatives to determine what will be of benefit to victims.

Overall, the Policy Centre will become a centre of expertise on legislation, policies, and programs which help victims.

This new funding for the Policy Centre is a concrete expression of the Government of Canada's commitment to ensure that the perspective of victims of crime becomes a cornerstone in the development of policies and legislation that touch their lives.

The Policy Centre, with your help and the help of communities across Canada, will give victims a stronger voice in the criminal justice system by offering a forum to air their views. We were pleased that a member of the CPA attended our recent roundtable of representatives from all components of the criminal justice system. The meeting was a great success, creating a consultation process with non-governmental organizations, service providers and advocates. I look forward to continuing to work with the CPA, and its members, on victims' policies in the future.

Conclusion

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here today. I am pleased to have been able to speak about the Government of Canada's efforts to improve confidence in the justice system. As Minister of Justice it has been important to me that our justice system include victims; that it include the safety of police officers and that it include the best efforts of communities across Canada to prevent crime.

These are goals we all share. I look forward to our continued progress on these issues of mutual concern.

Thank you.

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